ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org marprail@yahoo.com

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The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1973 to improve passenger train service, travel conditions for passengers, and to work for the preservation of historic rail stations.

Monthly meetings are held at locations around the state. Check the website for dates and venues. The public is invited to attend.

MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2014-2016

Larry Krieg	*Chair*
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position open	*Secretary*
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The Michigan Passenger Editor and Webmaster, Larry Sobczak
ON TRACK Editor, Kay Chase

2015 MEETINGS

10 January – Lansing's former Grand Trunk Depot with Special Guest Speaker Bob Johnston, writer for TRAINS Magazine

February – CANCELLED

March 14 (tentative) – Kalamazoo, Metro Transit Conference Room

April – TBA

9 May – Amtrak Train Days

June-August -- TBA

5 September –Annual Meeting at Durand Union Station

October-December – TBA

Visit www.marp.org
Email marprail@yahoo.com

Lawmakers Gear Up

It may be cold outside, but things are warming up under the capitol dome in Lansing and in the halls of Congress. With uncertainty about the outcome of the May ballot proposal and a looming budget shortfall in Michigan, legislators have their work cut out for them as they grapple with the deteriorating condition of the state's road and bridges and the challenge of adequately funding the growing needs for good public transit and intercity passenger transportation.

Meanwhile, in Washington DC, there appears to be agreement that fixing the nation's infrastructure is vital to remaining competitive in the world economy, but very little agreement as to how that will be accomplished.

Rep. Bill Shuster's House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has moved with considerable speed on two major transportation bills. The Amtrak reauthorization bill, titled Passenger Rail Reform and Investment Act of 2015, or PRRIA (H.R. 749), was passed out of committee on February 12. The bill caps Amtrak's authorization at $1.41B in FY 2016, then gradually increases it to $1.46B in FY 2019. The bill also contains $300M for infrastructure investments, with half going to the Northeast Corridor.

The FY 2015 Amtrak appropriation was $1.39B, unchanged from the previous year. By contrast, the President's FY 2016 budget seeks $2.45B for Amtrak. The Federal Railroad Administration has established that $5 billion per year is the minimum required to grow the system

The National Association of Railroad Passengers issued a press release stating that the bill falls "woefully short" of Amtrak's most basic needs and hinders capacity expansion at a time of growing ridership and demand for more choice in transportation among the American public.

The Midwest High Speed Rail Association sees the bill as "another five years of treading water" and urges advocates to tell Congress that it "needs to do a lot better." Click here to send your personalized message.

The House T&I committee is also working on the Surface Transportation Reauthorization bill which funds highways and public transit.

(***LAWMAKERS*** *continues on page 3*)



There will be no MARP meeting in February. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for March 14 at the Kalamazoo Metro Transit Center. Members often take the train when we meet in Kalamazoo. Jump on board and make your reservations now.

CLICK HERE to save 20% on your fare

TRAINS Writer Bob Johnston Speaks at MARP Meeting

Notes by Don Westcott & Kay Chase

Thirty-six MARP members and friends met on January 10 at the former GTW depot in Lansing. The building has been beautifully restored by the Lansing Board of Water and Light in conjunction with the development of their state-of-the-art co-generation plant next door. The BWL uses the historic depot building for office and meeting space and has graciously made it available to MARP for a yearly meeting.

Bob Johnston, well-known for his articles in TRAINS magazine, traveled on the *Blue Water* from his home in Chicago to speak with us about some of the critical issues affecting passenger train service in the Midwest as well as the challenges facing Amtrak's *Southwest Chief*.

It is his understanding that ongoing MDOT negotiations regarding acquisition of the Talgo trains rejected by Wisconsin revolve around issues of responsibility for maintenance and location of a maintenance facility. It is most likely the units would be used to supplement the Wolverine Service.

Johnston touched on the current "south-of-the-lake" study that seeks to reduce travel delays for the 10 daily Michigan trains and the 4 East Coast trains into and out of Chicago. He showed a photo of abandoned ROW slightly south of the existing route in northern Indiana, but cautioned that it would have to be completely rebuilt.

Discussions continue between Indiana and Amtrak over the future of the *Hoosier State* following the collapse of the deal that would have seen Corridor Capitol LLC providing the service. *[A January 31 news release announced that Amtrak, under contract with IN-DOT, will continue to operate the Hoosier State through April 1.]*

Johnston showed photos of the raised track bed and new bridge in central North Dakota necessitated by the still-rising waters of Devil's Lake. With some of BNSF's major projects along this route now completed, the *Empire Builder* resumed its normal schedule and route in both directions on January 12.

The New Mexico legislature reached the end of its short session with no decision on what the state will contribute to the effort to maintain the tracks used by the *Southwest Chief*. Kansas and Colorado have made financial commitments to retaining passenger service through the region in the face of BNSF's reluctance to maintain the track to passenger speeds.

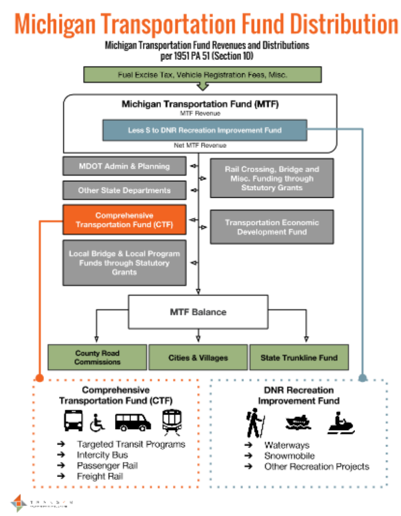
Johnston shared his recent "sneak-peak" at VIA's elegant new *"Prestige Class"* equipment on the *Canadian*, service

(***JOHNSTON** continues in column 2*)

Understanding How Michigan Pays For Transportation

In May, voters will be asked to approve a measure that promises to increase funding for transportation needs, schools and local revenue-sharing. It is important to recognize that it is not just "roads and bridges" that will benefit, but all forms of transportation. The additional revenues will go into the Michigan Transportation Fund – the MTF – to be dispersed in accordance with Public Act 51. Most of the MTF does go to roads, but 8-10% goes into the Comprehensive Transportation Fund – the CTF – to help pay for passenger trains & freight rail safety, some transit, intercity buses, and walking and bicycling facilities.

Click here for larger view



(***JOHNSTON** continued from column 1*)

that will be officially rolled out this summer. Stainless steel Budd cars have been refurbished, with 6 roomy bedrooms in each car offering a number of amenities and great views out the much enlarged windows. The rear of the train sports the round-end dome/observation car featuring beautiful upgrades as well.

In the Q & A period, Johnston opined that he doesn't think Amtrak will alter the route of either the *Capitol Limited* or *Lake Shore* to come through Michigan.

In the business portion of the meeting, Treasurer Jeanie Merckel presented the 2015 budget as approved by the executive committee on December 13. The $17,000 budget is up from $15,420 in 2014 and includes $2,700 carried over from last year. As of Nov. 30 the Pratt Fund (investment) stood at $18,083.99 for a gain of $942.75 since Oct. 23.

Following the meeting, many members enjoyed a fine lunch at another of Lansing's historic depots, now masquerading as Clara's Lansing Station.

(***LAWMAKERS*** *continued from page 1*)

In a statement issued last week, Michael Melaniphy, President of the American Public Transportation Association, decried the move to eliminate public transit from the Highway Trust Fund as called for by some members of Congress, saying that such an action would "hurt the millions of Americans who use it every day" and adding that growing demand calls for increased, not reduced, spending.

In the meantime, USDOT Secretary Anthony Foxx has been traveling the country touting the Administration's six year, $478 billion proposal to improve the nation's highways, transit, passenger trains and intermodal freight. Included in the plan is a new rail-dedicated account in the proposed Transportation Trust Fund that would invest $28.55 billion over the next six years in passenger rail — giving the predictability and stability needed for long-range planning and development.

An analysis of the President's proposal is available here.

In a first of its kind, Foxx recently taped an hour-long "Fireside Chat" with Google Chairman, Eric Schmidt, about the trends and choices facing our transportation system over the next three decades. He had a similar conversation with faculty at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in January.

Upcoming Outreach Events

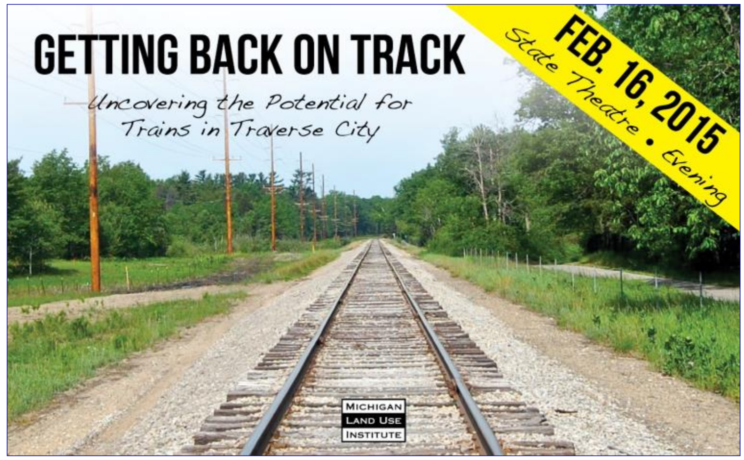
If you would like information about any of these events, please contact Chuck Merkel crmerckel@aol.com 734-522-7329.

45th Annual Ann Arbor Model RR Club Show & Sale
14 & 15 February • 10 to 3
Saline Middle School 7190 N. Maple Rd.
Saline MI 48176
Contact: Clark Charnetski camcharnet@aol.com 734-761-3814

Essenhaus Train Show
21 February • 9 to 2:30
240 U.S. 20, Middlebury IN 46540
Contact: Warren Fritz wrfritz41@gmail.com 269-345-8004

Trains and Trades
22 February • 10 to 3
Beacon Hill Golf Club, 6011 Majestic Oaks Dr
Commerce Township MI 48382
Contact: Chuck Merkel crmerckel@aol.com 734.522.7329

17th Annual Women's Expo
13 March • 10 to 8, 14 March • 10 to 6, 15 March • 11 to 5
Devos Place, Grand Rapids MI 49503
Contact: Warren Fritz wrfritz41@gmail.com 269-345-8004



Greetings from the Michigan Land Use Institute!



There's real momentum in Michigan to expand passenger rail. Major improvements to the tracks from Detroit to Chicago have trains moving 110 mph on some stretches. In the heart of Detroit, a new 3.3-mile rail line along Woodward Avenue is under construction. There is also significant progress to establish commuter rail service between Ann Arbor, Brighton, and Howell.

Here at MLUI, we want to capitalize on that momentum, and help bring modern passenger rail service back to Traverse City.

We have a vision for rail service connecting TC to Ann Arbor; it would strengthen our regional economy, stimulate development along the route and take cars off the highways. And the best part--it can really happen.

I hope you'll join us on Feb. 16 at the State Theatre in Traverse City to learn how rail is taking off in the state and what we can do to make a connection to southern Michigan a reality. The event kicks off at 7 p.m. with a panel discussion. Then stick around after for a free showing of Alfred Hitchcock's classic, "Strangers On a Train."

See you there!

~Hans Voss
MLUI Executive Director

In the fiscal year that ended 30 September 2014, Amtrak's **ticket revenue rose 4%** to a record $2.2 billion and **ridership ticked up 0.2%** to 30.9 million compared with the previous year. Michigan's ***Blue Water*** route was one of nine routes nationwide that set ridership records.

Amtrak Chair Coscia, in testimony before a Senate subcommittee in December, said that "Amtrak's Federal operating funding requirement was $227 million — more than $100 million less than in FY 2013 — and **Amtrak's lowest operating requirement ever**, in inflation-adjusted dollars." Taken as a whole, Amtrak covers more than 90% of its operating costs with corporate revenue and state support."

View from elsewhere . . .

"CN is proud to bring this innovative program to promote tree-planting to communities along the CN corridor. Trees are an important part of sustainable urban landscapes. They help purify air, provide shade and habitat for songbirds, decrease soil erosion and help manage storm water."

— John F. Orr, CN vice-president and chief safety and sustainability officer, launching CN's EcoConnexions From the Ground Up program that will provide grants of up to $25,000 to communities for tree planting and other greening programs, with a particular emphasis on properties adjacent to its rail lines.

"According to people like Obama and Shuster, the phrase 'transportation infrastructure' equates to 'roads and bridges'. They just don't get it - and until the day arrives that they (or their successors) do, I see no reason to hope for responsible 'investments' to be made, or for the U.S. to be truly 'competitive in a global economy'."

— Garl Boyd Latham, Principal *at* Latham Railway Services*, commenting on the President's State of the Union address and the response to it by Rep. Bill Shuster, Chair of the House T&I Committee.*



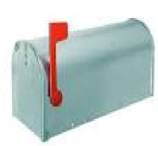
CN Partners to Plant 50,000 Trees

A mile-long stretch of Chicago's Burnham Wildlife Corridor got a makeover in May as more than 800 volunteers planted trees in an area sandwiched between the tracks and Lakeshore Drive. The project will create high-quality habitat for migrating birds as well as a community asset for residents of the nearby Bronzeville and Pilsen neighborhoods.



The railroad is cooperating in plans to provide access over the tracks. Read about the project HERE and HERE .

OUR ADDRESS HAS CHANGED



MARP, INC
PO BOX 510842
LIVONIA, MI 48151-6842

Contact Your Lawmaker

Congressional Switchboard
202-224-3121

Sen. Debbie Stabenow

Sen. Gary Peters

Your Congress Person

Your State Representative

Your State Senator